



FIREFIGHTER

Volume 32 No. 2 March 2004

A photograph showing the lower legs and boots of a firefighter in full turnout gear, including yellow-striped turnout pants and black boots. The firefighter is standing over a large-scale map of a town or city area. The map includes various buildings, roads, and landmarks, with several colored markers (red, blue, green) placed on it, likely indicating specific locations of interest or points of reference. The map is spread out on a dark surface.

Planning for the future

EDITORIAL

Moving Forward Together



THE Union recently undertook what constitutes an almost unique initiative within the traditions of the Labour Movement.

Up and down the country, Officials from all levels of the FBU got together with the Executive Committee and the national negotiating team to discuss the strategy of the pay campaign and how to organise effectively in the future.

Together, we looked at origins of the pay campaign in the context of our falling earnings relative to other key workers and the "modernisation" agenda that has for years been coming our way.

Together, we examined the tactics of industrial action, the negotiations and the role of lay Officials and the Membership in this process, while bearing in mind the backdrop of Government threats of imposition, strike bans and the Iraq war.

Together, we examined the June pay

settlement, again taking into account our pay claim, expectations and other pay-for-modernisation deals in the public sector.

And together, we examined the battles today, those ahead and how, as a Union, we can most effectively deal with them.

In short, over the past couple of months or so, we explored every dark room and every dark corner of the dispute, the settlement and our current position.

Diverse views were aired and I hope, lessons learned. Ultimately it was an extremely useful exercise and one that was in the best democratic traditions of the Union.

Moving Forward Together was the theme of these seminars. And having fought the pay campaign Together, having debated it Together, I think it is high time to translate those words into action and get Moving Forward Together.

That is, if the collective interests of

Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff are really what we are about.

We have much on our plate. The Fire and Rescue Services Bill, the revision of the NJC Constitution, the process of establishing IPDS nationwide, the final stages of the pay deal (including the pay formula) local IRMPs, regionalisation, and so on. And none of it has been – or will be – easy.

But, if we look beyond the immediate horizon of the Fire and Rescue Services, we are living in a world where the Government is leaving no stone unturned in the public services. And little is being offered to public service workers in return.

Just take the civil service: 80,000 jobs could go in the civil service and the only pay increase (not on the table, imposed) is below inflation for most staff. So it's no wonder they are going on strike and we must support them in any way we can.

Public services, clearly, are at the top



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of the agenda as we enter the campaign season for the 2005 general elections. This is regardless of political party. Labour, the Liberals and the Conservatives all agree that this is the number one issue.

But we are seeing the Tory Opposition trying to outdo the Government on cuts to public spending. And all the while, they are trying to persuade us, the general public won't notice a thing!

They talk of eliminating "bureaucratic waste", but the fact is, as the Government's own top civil servants admit (they won't be among those getting the chop!), politicians don't have a clue of where the waste lies. For they have no idea of the value to the public of public services. And why? Because they don't listen to those delivering the services on the frontline, like Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff.

But just because they don't appear to listen, that's no reason for us to stop telling them – and their constituents. So, just as the FBU is doing at national level around the new legislation for the Fire and Rescue Service, at every level of the Union we need to be telling our fellow trade unionists, local communities and local politicians, about the dangers of the proposed changes to fire cover under local IRMPs to their physical well-being and (as far as councillors are concerned) their political careers. And we need to be explaining to them our target of Zero Fire Deaths.

We also need to get organising again, drawing on the wealth of experience built

up during the pay campaign, mobilising members around our goals for a first class Fire and Rescue Service of the 21st century

But we shouldn't get too daunted by the tasks ahead.

Just think about the plight of the Chinese cockle pickers of Morecambe Bay, shunned by the local community, exploited by their rogue employers and paying with their lives despite the best efforts of rescue teams, including firefighters.

As Tony Woodley, General Secretary of the TGWU, which has just launched a campaign to organise migrants as part of a wider push by British trade unions to organise the UK's most vulnerable workers, said: "‘Drowning’ will be the word on their death certificate, but it is cowboy capitalism that has caused this dreadful human tragedy."

The defence of vulnerable working people and, in particular, their health and safety, is something FBU members, in their everyday working lives, know plenty about.

But we must remember that this can only be achieved if, as a union, we engage in collective, sustained and unified action.

So let's all now start Moving Forward Together.

Andy Gilchrist



Inside

Labour Link

4

Don't sit on the sidelines, says UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis

Pensions victory

6

A successful appeal led by the FBU may make it easier to fight unjust medical decisions

Legislation watch

9

A round-up of key changes in employment law

Diary

10

Health & Safety

11

Equality

12

Working together in Northern Ireland

13

Activists at an FBU seminar emerged with a new sense of direction and understanding of the need for collective action

International

15

Jeremy Corbyn MP reports from a 100,000-strong meeting in India

Letters

18

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F B U C O N F I D E N T I A L S T R E S S A N D S U P P O R T L I N E

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DON'T BE BULLIED, DON'T GET STRESSED, GET HELP FROM THE FBU FREE SERVICE

A matter of choice



It's a thousand times better to be in there than sitting on the sidelines sulking, says Dave Prentis

UNISON is Britain's largest trade union. Of our 1.3 million members, some 570,000 choose to pay the affiliated political levy, making UNISON the largest affiliate to the Labour Party.

Why do they make that choice, and why do I, as General Secretary, think it is so important for UNISON to play a leading role in the Labour Party? It isn't because we agree with everything the Labour Government does – because we don't! It isn't because two of UNISON's predecessor unions had a long history within the Labour Party. It isn't even because Labour's values are closest to ours, important though that is. It's because being at the heart of the Party in Government gets results for our members.

I can quite understand why many FBU members reading this will be cynical. Does it get results, you are bound to ask.

I remember what it was like with a Tory Government. No access, no influence, we were frozen out and presented with an

industrial relations framework that made it harder and harder for us to defend our members. It isn't perfect now, far from it. But it's better – and Ministers talk to us, debate with us, and sometimes they deliver for us.

UNISON has been campaigning hard for years against the contracting-out of our public services. We know it hits service

Last year, UNISON members voted overwhelmingly to keep their influence, to give those who wanted to within UNISON the choice to stay with Labour

standards – remember how hospital cleaning has suffered. But it also hits our members, with many people, particularly new joiners, struggling on inferior terms and conditions. We made the case to Government, through our involvement with the Labour Party, and although there is still more to be done, we have made substantial progress in ending the threat of a two-tier workforce.

Despite this, there are voices in my union who call for a break with Labour. Many of them are members of other political parties, so it's no surprise. Others have been Labour members and supporters who are disenchanted – I understand that. So UNISON embarked on a two-year consultation and investigation into our links with Labour, looking at our relationship with the Party at every level and asking whether we still wanted to be involved and if so, what needed to change. The issue dominated our National Delegate Conference last June. The debate was heated and impassioned. I made it clear where I stand:

"It's a thousand times better for this union to be in there – opening doors, using our influence, working with the Party, confronting Government, challenging its every move – than sitting on the sidelines sulking. It's our Party."

"We will work with our friends to reclaim it. We will work with our friends to reform it, because that's what our members expect us to do. And as long as I am General Secretary it will be UNISON taking our aims and our values, our aspirations, our policies into the Labour Party and not the reverse."

"And who would gain from weakening the link? The Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, big business, the CBI, the Murdoch press, the Daily Mail, the right wing of the Labour Party, the Tories, the BNP."

"And where would it leave our union? In the wilderness."

In that debate, we reflected on what UNISON members had been telling us.

They wanted information, better communication, better liaison, but they were not seeking change to the basic structure established when UNISON was founded.

If we had weakened the link, where would it have left our union? In the wilderness

Six months on, we have already succeeded in arguing for Labour to undertake a fundamental review of the way Party makes policy.

We have persuaded the Labour Party at Labour Conference that the Government got it wrong on Foundation Hospitals. Now we are setting about developing a positive alternative vision for the future of our public services and I am confident that on this too we will win the support of Labour Party members and other trade unions.

We are encouraging more and more of our branches to get affiliated and get involved in their local Labour Party. We

are playing an active role in Labour's Big Conversation – encouraging our members to take part and telling Government clearly where we think they are getting it wrong. You can read our response on our special web page at www.unison.org.uk/bigconversation.

Walking away from Labour would be the easy option, but the wrong one.

Staying in, winning the argument, building the case for what we know is right is harder, but it is the only realistic chance for us to influence Government.

Last year, UNISON members faced that choice. Overwhelmingly, they voted to keep their influence, to give those who wanted to within UNISON the choice to stay with Labour. My task is to make sure that we use that influence to maximum advantage for our members.

I don't want to see a Tory Prime Minister in Downing Street, be it Michael Howard or their next hopeful. But I do want to see a third-term Labour Government and it is securing that which will occupy our attentions in the coming months.

RMT EXPELLED FROM PARTY

THE RMT transport union has been expelled from the Labour Party after the Party's NEC decided on January 27 that the union had placed itself outside the Constitution of the Party by allowing branches of the union to affiliate to the Scottish Socialists.

The expulsion followed a special general meeting of the RMT, February 6, to discuss the matter.

In response, the RMT is to consider legal action because the NEC did not first allow the union a hearing before the decision to expel was made.

"RMT is not seeking disaffiliation from the Labour Party," says

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow.

"We had asked members of the NEC to give the union the opportunity to state its case and to defer any decision until after our special general meeting on February 6.

"RMT has been denied any opportunity to put its case to the NEC or the Constitutional Subcommittee and we have yet to be told which of the Labour Party's rules the union has broken."

"The union will now look at the options left open to this decision, including the option of legal action," adds Bob Crow.

At its 2003 Annual General Meeting the RMT passed a rule change that enshrined affiliation to the Labour Party in the RMT rule book.

But the AGM also agreed that RMT branches and regional councils should be free to support other organisations and campaigns in pursuance of the union's policy objectives, subject to the approval of the RMT Council of Executives and RMT Officers.



JES HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



You've got to be in it to win it – Dave Prentis and the UNISON delegation take part in the Labour Conference card vote that last year rejected Foundation Hospitals

LEGAL

In November, an FBU member won justice in a long and hard legal battle to gain an ill-health pension.

The case, in which the FBU was represented by Thompson's Solicitors, involved our member's appeal to the Liverpool Crown Court under Rule H3(2) of the Firemen's Pension Scheme (FPS) Order 1992 against the reconsideration by Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority under Rule H3(1) of the Scheme.

The appeal proceeded to Liverpool Crown Court and was listed for a three day hearing between 12 and 14 November 2003.

On the second day of the hearing Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority agreed a declaration to the effect that:

- Our member became permanently disabled and was medically retired under Rule A15 of the Scheme on 4 October 2002 and
- Was entitled to an ill-health pension under Rule B3 of the Scheme calculated as if he had been a regular firefighter in receipt of pensionable pay at that date and backdated to that date.

In addition, the Authority undertook to withdraw all charges against our member under the Fire Service (Disciplinary) Regulations 1985 and to remove any reference thereto from his service record. A claim for repayment of sick pay by the Authority was also withdrawn.

Ill-health pension victory

A successful appeal led by the FBU may make it easier in the future to fight unjust medical decisions by Fire and Rescue Service employers

OUR member, now 40 years of age, was appointed as a firefighter in November 1986. From 1989 onwards he suffered a number of back strains and recurrences of his back strain, and had various periods of absence from work as a result.

In February 1999 he sustained a back strain whilst on duty when he was lifting hose out of a locker at work. He was absent from work for an extended period of time until July 2000 when he returned to other duties.

During his absence from work he was examined by the Brigade medical officer, Dr Willdig, who noted a long standing back problem and x-ray evidence showing narrowing of the discs.

Shortly afterwards he was examined by a consultant orthopaedic surgeon on referral from his GP who said that the back was now beginning to decompensate and the likelihood was that he would have recurring episodes of facet joint arthritis. Our member was advised to start thinking about changing his occupation from that

of a firefighter. This diagnosis was made known to Dr Willdig.

Our member remained off work and was seen regularly by Dr Willdig. In September 1999, Dr Willdig identified that our member was certainly unfit to return to work but was improving and that it might be possible to consider "other duties" when next reviewed.

On 21 February 2000, Dr Willdig wrote to our member's GP acknowledging that our member would like to be considered for ill-health retirement. He said that our member had to be permanently incapable of all duties and that in his view, our member could probably manage to do work of a semi-sedentary or sedentary nature.

Consideration was given to non-operational duties on a daily nine to five basis. However, our member faced significant difficulties because his back condition was aggravated by his 45 mile drive to work.

In April 2000 our member was examined by another consultant orthopaedic surgeon who reported that our



THOMPSONS
SOLICITORS

member would never be fit to return to work as an operational firefighter. This opinion was made known to Dr Willdig who reported back to the Fire Authority that our member's condition was essentially unchanged and that he was not fit for any duties at the time being.

Dr Willdig re-examined on 10 July 2000 and our member was told that he could work between the hours of 10.00am and 3.00pm, travelling to work by public transport. He reported to the Fire Authority that our member was fit, for the time being, for less arduous duties than full fire fighting duties, to exclude lifting more than 10kg, repetitive bending etc. Even though there was a divergence of opinion between Dr Willdig and our member's GP, the otherwise mandatory Grey Book procedure for resolution of such divergence was not employed by the Fire Authority.

On the same day of the examination, 10 July 2000, our member was ordered by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to report for

duty on 11 July 2000. Our member did so and was given duties at Merseyside Fire Brigade Headquarters.

Our member encountered serious problems as a result of the extra burden of travelling to work. He was taking medication up to the maximum allowable.

On 22 July 2000 our member wrote to the CFO to the effect that the consensus of opinion was that he would never work again as an operational firefighter.

He claimed the right to retire with a pension in the light of the case of *ex parte Lockwood and McCallman* in the Court of Appeal. The following day he met with a station officer. He was told that he would not receive any documentation indicating that he would never return to operational duties, that he had been given the career move recommended by his doctors and that his only options were to resign, to continue working on new duties or to go sick and take the consequences.

On 24 July our member was examined by another Brigade medical officer, Dr Jones. Our member says that he was advised orally that he would never be operationally fit again. This was disputed by Dr Jones, although he did record that our member "might never be fully operational but would probably be able to do more than at present". Dr Jones reported that whether our member would ever be fit enough to be fully operational remained

The case raised two important points of principle: an appeal to the Crown Court can be made without grounds and the grounds can then be filed later; the Crown Court does have jurisdiction for dealing with medical issues

open at the "relatively early stage". Our member was ordered by the CFO that he was fit for other duties only and to carry on reporting for light duties. With regard to the request for medical retirement, our member was told that he was still a regular firefighter and might be required to engage in operational duties.

It is relevant that neither Brigade medical officer asked the question, would our member probably not be operationally fit in the foreseeable future.

Our member continued in his duties albeit with some considerable difficulty. He complained that he was in intolerable pain.

On 21 August 2000 our member was asked to provide assistance in moving a desk in the office. He did so and strained his back. He went off sick. Whilst on sick his back improved. Our member undertook controlled exercises. His GP, osteopath and physiotherapists recommended him to keep active.

The response of Merseyside Fire Service to our member going off sick was to inform him that he was not entitled to contractual sick pay and that he would have to repay sickness payments that he had received. Furthermore, it started video surveillance of our member at his home which was designed to prove that he was malingering.

By this stage our Solicitors were instructed to act on our member's behalf and sent copies of the consultant orthopaedic surgeons report to the CFO. They formally requested a reconsideration, under Rule H3 (10), of our member's claim to be entitled to an ill health award.

Our member's GP continued to sign him off sick even though the Brigade medical officer said that he was fit for other duties. There was no referral to the Board of Medical Referees as the Fire Service was obliged to do under the Grey Book.

In November 2000 our member was notified that he was under investigation, under the Discipline Regulations, following a complaint that he undertook a task of duty (lifting the desk) contrary to occupational health advice to refrain from lifting.

LEGAL

The Fire Service started video surveillance of our member at his home to prove that he was malingering. He was doing nothing that he had said that he was unfit to do

In March 2001, our member was charged with an offence of disobedience to orders for lifting the desk.

On 12 April 2001, the CFO heard the disciplinary charge against our member, found it proven and dismissed our member with effect from 3 May 2001. An appeal was submitted to the disciplinary tribunal.

There was considerable delay on the part of the Fire Authority to list the pension claim for reconsideration. The Fire Authority initially insisted that the disciplinary appeal hearing should be heard before the reconsideration hearing. Our Solicitors challenged their approach and after lengthy correspondence the Fire Authority changed its mind and the reconsideration was listed for 23 April 2002.

By that stage, further medical reports had been obtained by the Fire Authority commenting on the video of our member. The prejudicial effect of the video surveillance was apparent because the doctors then raised questions of our member's credibility. The appeals committee upheld the original decision to refuse our member an ill health retirement pension.

On 26 September 2002, our member appealed to the Crown Court. The main contentions put forward on behalf of our member was that he had been retired with effect from 11 July 2000 and was entitled to an ill-health pension backdated until then. This was on the basis that he was permanently disabled from operational duty and had been ordered back to non-operational duty on 10 July 2000.

Alternatively, it was contended that our member was retired on 25th July 2000 when he was advised orally by the Brigade medical officer that he would never be an operational firefighter again. Alternatively, it was submitted that our member was at some time after those dates permanently disabled and that the question of his retirement should be reconsidered.

It was submitted that the question of permanent disablement had arisen at the time of our member's letter to the CFO of the 22 July 2000 when the medical officer knew that our member wished to be medically retired and informed management of that. The Fire Authority was obliged to properly address the permanent disablement question and could not avoid it.

It was submitted that the CFO's decision on 10 July 2000 to place our member on indefinite "other duties" was effectively a decision as to permanent disablement for firefighting.

The Fire Authority lodged a response which included a submission that the appeal to Crown Court had been made out of time and that no extension of time should be given.

Our member's case came before the Crown Court on the preliminary issue of the time limit on 23rd June 2002. The Crown Court found in our member's favour on this issue and took into account the delays caused by the Fire Authority.

Two important points of principle arose from the judgment on the preliminary issue:

- An appeal to the Crown Court can be made without grounds and the grounds can then be filed later;
- The Judge upheld Burton J in the Lockwood and McCallman cases and held that the Crown Court does have jurisdiction for dealing with medical issues.

Our member's case then proceeded to a further hearing before the Crown Court on the substantive issue.

Our Solicitors arranged for the two Brigade medical officers to attend the hearing, and for the video recording to be shown to the court.

The question of the video evidence was met head on. The Court was invited to view

the video recording and it was shown in Court. It showed our member engaging in a number of activities outside his home: mowing the lawn, cleaning windows and tidying up the garden. It showed our member doing nothing that he had said that he was unfit to do. It was submitted that our member was an honest man who had fallen victim to the prejudicial effect of having been subject to covert surveillance.

On the morning of the second day of the appeal hearing, the Fire Authority's lawyers made certain proposals which culminated in the settlement.

The precise figures, as to the pension that our member will be entitled to, have not yet been calculated. However, they will be based on the pay of a firefighter with 15 years service who retired in 2002 on ill health grounds. It will be backdated to 4th October 2002.

At the time that our Solicitor was initially instructed, our member's case was one of a number of cases for Merseyside firefighters who had been refused ill health retirement by the CFO, Mr. Saunders. Those cases were concluded successfully at the reconsideration stage although, in at least one of those cases, it was necessary to commence an appeal in the Crown Court before the Fire Authority referred the case for reconsideration.

Our member's case was by far the most difficult of the cases because of the problems with the medical evidence and the prejudicial effect of the video.

The Union would like to thank Matthew Tollitt of Thompson's Solicitors for all his work achieving such a satisfactory outcome for our member.

Our member's case was one of a number for Merseyside firefighters who had been refused ill-health retirement by the Chief Fire Officer, Mr. Saunders

EMPLOYMENT LAW



**Carolyn Jones,
Director of the
Institute of
Employment
Rights, gives
a round-up
of the key recent
developments in
employment law**



WORKING TIME: UK CLINGING ON TO THE OPT-OUT CLAUSE

November 2003 was the 10th anniversary of the introduction of the Working Time Regulations.

When the Regulations were introduced, the UK was the only country in Europe to implement an opt-out clause – allowing workers to “voluntarily” agree to work more than 48 hours.

But the opt-out clause was due to end in November 2003, by which time UK employers were expected to have systematically reduced working time in line with other European Union States.

Instead, the numbers working more than 48 hours a week have actually increased over the decade and UK workers still work the longest hours in Europe.

But rather than accepting that the opt-out clause has been a failure, the Government is now resisting Europe’s demand to end the opt-out and are instead trying to convince other European States to opt-in to the same opt-out!

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS BILL NEEDS REVIEWING

When the Government introduced its flagship employment legislation – The Employment Relations Act – in 1999 it promised to review the legislation to make sure it was delivering fairness at work.

The review took place in 2003 leading to the introduction of the Employment Relations Bill in December 2003.

The Bill contains some useful provisions:

- employers will no longer be able to legally bribe union members into leaving the union
- unions will regain control of their rule books and be able to decide who is allowed into membership
- new rights to information and consultation will be introduced.

But as with much of the legislative framework, as important as what is in the Bill, is what is left out.

In this instance what is left out are:

- proposals for an Unfair Labour Practices Clause which would deter employers using anti-union tactics to stop union recognition
- proposals to extend the rights of union recognition to the 6 million workers working in small firms
- removal of the many hurdles in the recognition procedures that employers are using to trip-up unions seeking recognition
- protection for workers sacked after taking lawful industrial action for over eight weeks
- proposals for an extension of collective bargaining to ensure employers have to discuss pensions with the union
- proposals to prevent sweetheart deals being set up to avoid recognition of the union preferred by the workforce.

Unfortunately, the list goes on and on – leading many in the trade union movement to complain that the Government is once again listening too closely to the business lobby and failing to deliver the promised fairness at work.

It is hoped that some improvements to the legislation can be won during the Bill’s

passage through Parliament, as more and more backbenchers express their anger and frustration at the Government’s approach.

EQUALITY UPDATE

Over the last 30 years there have been significant developments in the legal regulation of discrimination at work. Yet discrimination remains endemic in the UK.

A recent Directive from Europe (The Framework Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment) could help to chip away at that discrimination – but only if the Government transposes it into UK law in a meaningful way.

Some of the provisions came into force in December 2003. Below is a summary of the main laws.

● **The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations** came into force on 1 December 2003 and provide all workers (including agency and contract) with the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

The Regulations cover direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

However, though the Regulations have been welcomed for plugging a gap in the equality legislation, they have also been criticised for the number and extent of exemptions included.

The most important exemption relates to benefits dependent on marital status – a weakness which will allow pension schemes which only pay survivors’ benefits to married partners, to continue to exclude gay and unmarried partners.

● **The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations** came into force on 3rd December 2003.

The scope of the Regulations is wide, covering all workers, including agency and contract workers.

They also cover post employment discrimination – ie the provision of references – and offer protection against victimisation and harassment.

Employers will now have to justify any

EMPLOYMENT LAW



PAUL HERMANN/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

discrimination rather than the worker having to statistically prove they have been discriminated against.

However, on the negative side, the Government has adopted a more flexible approach to justification and failed to maintain the duty to make reasonable accommodations, introduced in other anti-discrimination legislation.

Other equality legislation is due to come into force over the next three years with disability in October 2004, sex equality in September 2005 and age in October 2006.

A SINGLE EQUALITY COMMISSION

In October 2003 the Government announced its plans to create a single equality commission – provisionally called the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

The plan is to bring together the work of the three existing equality bodies – the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission.

The proposed Commission will also take responsibility for new laws outlawing workplace discrimination on age, religion

or belief and sexual orientation, as well as promoting human rights.

While it is clear that some “joined-up” thinking is needed across the complex web of discrimination laws and equality bodies, some have argued that creating a single equality commission before developing a single equality act is putting the cart before the horse.

According to the Institute of Employment Rights, the biggest problem with discrimination law in the UK is its complex and incoherent nature.

Even before the introduction of the new European Employment Equality Directive, UK equality law consisted of no fewer than 30 Acts of Parliament, 38 Statutory Instruments, 11 Codes of Practice and 12 European Community Directives and Recommendations!

If this confusing mosaic of equality laws is not replaced with harmonised equality legislation before the Commission becomes operational in 2006, then reservations about its ability to enforce the legislation are likely to grow.

- Log onto the website of the Institute of Employment Rights (IER) at www.ier.org.uk for regular updates on employment legislation.

DIARY



Wednesday 10 March CARDIFF
FBU seminar on South Wales Retained Project

Wednesday 10 March – EASTBOURNE
Friday 12 March
TUC Women's Conference

Friday 12 March – MANCHESTER
Sunday 14 March
Labour's Spring Conference

Friday 26 March – BIRMINGHAM
Sunday 28 March
TUC Young Members' Conference 2004

Monday 19 April – GLASGOW
Thursday 22 April
STUC Congress 2004

Thursday 27 April – DERRY
Friday 28 April
ICTU Biennial Northern Ireland Conference

Friday 28 April – LLANDUDNO
Sunday 30 April
Wales TUC Annual Conference

Tuesday 11 May – BRIDLINGTON
Friday 14 May
FBU Annual Conference

Thursday 27 May – TENBY
Friday 28 May
Walesfire Conference

Monday 13 September – BRIGHTON
Thursday 16 September
TUC Congress 2004

Sunday 26 September – BRIGHTON
Thursday 30 September
Labour Party Conference

Friday, 8 October – WORTLEY HALL
Sunday 10 October
FBU Black and Ethnic Minority Members School

Friday 15 October – WORTLEY HALL
Sunday 17 October
FBU Gay and Lesbian School

Saturday 30 October – WORTLEY HALL
Friday 5 November
FBU National School

HEALTH & SAFETY

MANSLAUGHTER PROBE FOLLOWS MIGRANT DEATHS

Police investigating the deaths of 20 people who drowned picking cockles on Morecambe Bay are considering manslaughter charges. The cocklers, thought to be Chinese migrants, were working at night on 5 February when they were caught in rising tides. The deaths have sparked calls for more protection of migrant workers.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'This is not just a terrible tragedy but a crime. Whatever the legal status of these workers, they should not have been working in such dangerous, unsupervised conditions.' He added: 'The full force of the law must be brought against those responsible for their deaths. This incident provides a rare glimpse into the dangerous and exploitative conditions faced by many migrant workers on a daily basis.'

TGWU General Secretary Tony Woodley said: 'Drowning' will be the word on their death certificate, but it is cowboy capitalism that has caused this dreadful human tragedy.' The deaths follow earlier incidents where authorities had to assist Chinese cockle pickers in difficulty in the bay. This is bound to lead to questions as to why the (HSE) Health & Safety Executive had not intervened to stop what was evidently a highly dangerous practice.

In a total about face, the Government has promised tough new laws to drive unscrupulous 'gangmasters'

PHOTO: HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Iraqi Kurds pick strawberries in England's Vale of Evesham. The employer, Fusion Personnel, is working with the Ethical Trading Initiative to set up a licensing and registration scheme for gangmasters

out of business. The Government has consistently resisted union pressure, spearheaded by rural workers' union TGWU, for a licensing and regulation system. Home Secretary David Blunkett said he hoped a registration scheme for those who control the lucrative trade in casual seasonal labour could be put in place "very quickly."

He indicated the Government was now willing to back the Gangmasters Bill of Labour MP Jim Sheridan, which was drafted with the assistance from TGWU. Mr. Blunkett said: "We will want to back Jim Sheridan's Bill in relation to gangmasters and I hope we can move forward on that very quickly." The Bill was set to have its second reading on 27 February.

LANDMARK RULING ON WORKPLACE BULLYING

A Court of Appeal ruling could mean much bigger payouts for victims of workplace bullying. In a case backed by public sector union UNISON, the Court of Appeal overturned an interpretation of the law which limited compensation to financial loss and ignored any mental effects. Two out of three Appeal Judges agreed the 30-year-old Industrial Relations Act could

be interpreted to mean compensation could be awarded for any type of loss.

The case related to the unfair dismissal of harassed Hull City Council worker Christopher Dunnachie, who had originally won a £10,000 employment tribunal award after his 2001 resignation. The ruling means that employers found to have allowed bullying to take place could be liable for compensation claims for more than sheer economic loss of income – such as stress, or loss of reputation.

In most tribunal cases the compensation for financial loss is well under £10,000. The new ruling means that if a claimant has suffered additional stress or humiliation, they will be entitled to compensation for that personal damage.

"This is a momentous victory which will have widespread implications for other cases of unfair dismissal. It is also a significant legal move which will make the law on unfair dismissal much fairer," said UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis. "It is a real step forward and it should make employers think very carefully about tackling workplace bullying or paying the price."

HSE STAFF DRIVEN TO INDUSTRIAL ACTION

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is facing industrial action over pay. Prospect, the union representing inspectors in the safety enforcement agency, complains HSE can find the money for 'idiotic projects' but not for its own staff. It says HSE risks haemorrhaging key safety staff as a result.

The union will be balloting members on a range of industrial action measures, including selective stoppages, working to rule, non-compliance with much of HSE's internal bureaucracy, and mass 'going to work days' in offices where there is insufficient space for the staff based there.

The union is seeking a 2.6% pay increase but the offer currently tabled by the executive means that the most experienced staff in the organisation will see their pay grow by only 0.5% a year until 2006.

Prospect negotiator Richard Hardy said: "We hope this will illustrate that there is money available in HSE for idiotic projects and bureaucracy but not for a living wage increase." He added: "This is not just about levels of pay but about HSE's ability to maintain an experienced and committed workforce in order to deliver safe workplaces for all. HSE has already identified that its staff are leaving because they cannot reach the top of their pay scales." Last year Prospect warned HSE was losing staff as a result of a funding freeze.

EQUALITY

POOR CHILDCARE HITS POOREST MOST

The lack of affordable childcare in Britain means many parents and children of larger families are trapped in a life of low income and low expectations, according to a report from the Daycare Trust and the TUC.

The report, *Women, child poverty and childcare – making the links*, says that although only a third of all children are in large families (three or more children), they account for half of all poor children.

Some minority ethnic groups are particularly affected. Nearly a third of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian families have three or more children compared with 18% of white families and these groups are more likely to have very low incomes. The traditional link between family size and poverty has not been broken, argues the report.

Childcare provision is often patchy, inflexible and expensive, preventing women from returning to work or forcing them to work fewer hours to fit around childcare, according to the report. Partly as a result of decades of poor childcare provision, mothers working part-time have average hourly earnings of only 59% of men working full-time.

The report argues that the UK should learn from the experiences of countries like France and Sweden which have more generous parental and maternity pay and leave systems and where numerous affordable and extensive childcare options enable mothers to work full-time if they want to.

According to a separate report by the Daycare Trust, the typical cost of a nursery place for a child under two in 2004 is £134 a week, up 5% from £128 a week. This compares to an average household income of £562 a week.

Women, child poverty and childcare – making the links costs £10 and is available from Daycare Trust, tel: 020 7840 3350. www.tuc.org.uk

NHS AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

The Government should take steps to wipe out institutional racism in mental health services and appoint a national director for mental health and ethnicity to oversee the improvement of services to black and ethnic minority patients, according to the inquiry report into the death of psychiatric patient David "Rocky" Bennett published on February 12.

The report recommends all mental health services to have a written policy dealing with racist abuse and records of incidents should be kept. The mental health workforce should also be ethnically diverse and where appropriate, steps should be taken to retain, recruit and promote staff from ethnic minorities.

The inquiry team, led by retired High Court Judge Sir John Blofeld, examined the care and treatment given to Mr Bennett and a series of broader mental health issues, and was commissioned by the Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire Strategic Health Authority and the Department of Health. Its

conclusions echo the 1999 Macpherson report into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, which identified "institutional racism" in the police and led to a series of changes in operational practice.

The report said: "The inquiry believes institutional racism is present throughout the NHS and that greater effort is needed to combat it. Until that problem is addressed, people from black and minority ethnic communities will not be treated fairly. The cultural, social and spiritual needs of patients must be taken into account.

The Bennett inquiry was set up following his death at a secure unit in Norwich in October 1998. Mr Bennett, a Rastafarian, was suffering from schizophrenia. An inquest into his death in May 2002 concluded that he had died after being restrained by nurses and that he had been "let down by the system".

www.guardian.co.uk

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION BILL

The TUC has welcomed the publication by the Government of the draft new Disability Discrimination Bill. It is in strong support of most of the measures proposed to improve existing legislation, which are in line with the proposals made by the Disability Rights Task Force.

From the viewpoint of employment some of the most significant proposals are:

- The extension of the definition of disability so that it explicitly includes people

with HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis from the time of diagnosis (clause 12).

- A public sector duty to promote equality of opportunity for disabled persons, eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, is created, parallel to the provision in the Race Relations Amendment Act, which will have the effect of assisting a far more substantial advance in disability equality than could be achieved by reliance on individuals taking cases (clause 8).

- Extension of the law to cover transport vehicles (where at present only the infrastructure is covered) (clause 3).

- Extension of the law to include most private clubs (clause 5) and landlords (clause 6). This will have an impact also on organisations such as political parties.

- Consolidation of the DDA's coverage of discriminatory job advertisements (clause 1).

- Extension of the questionnaire, procedure from employment (part II) to goods and services (part III) issues (clause 10).

- Extension of coverage to more functions of public authorities not already covered (clause 4) and to protect local councillors from disability discrimination.

However, the TUC urges Government to introduce further measures into the draft bill to achieve additional legal support for the civil rights and equal treatment of disabled people. For more details see www.tuc.org.uk

Working together in Northern Ireland

FBU members and representatives at every level in Northern Ireland came out of the pay campaign bruised, battered, exhausted and not a little disillusioned. Because the full product of the June 2003 Agreement has not yet been delivered, members have not been able to put the dispute behind them and get on with their careers.

More importantly, for many of us, we have been unable to get on with the business of the FBU.

It quickly became evident to the Officials in Region 2 that we would have to achieve some sort of closure to the pay dispute and prepare to meet the inevitable challenges that our employers would present us with. But that is only half of the problem!

We have been left to lead a disillusioned membership, who in many cases have lost trust and confidence in the FBU and its representatives.

I am just about long enough in the

We don't know the outcome of future battles, but we will fare much better by working together

job to remember the recrimination that followed the return to work after the 1977/78 strike. Our two national strikes were vastly different in tactics and objective but in many ways the results are similar;

- A negotiated settlement for less than what we set out for.



Activists came out of a recent FBU seminar in Belfast with a new sense of direction and a greater understanding of the need for collective action in the future, says Tony Maguire

- Many members feeling let down and disappointed
- Allegations of incompetence and betrayal
- The hunt for scapegoats.
- Some people feeling disillusioned enough to consider leaving the FBU.

It was evident to Region 2 Officials that the general drop in morale and lack of confidence for the future had extended to many activists and representatives at all levels. The FBU was at a defining moment in its history. We had identified the problem and had already started to brainstorm a remedy when serendipity intervened and Head Office announced a series of Working Together seminars.

So we fenced off a weekend in mid-January and began to round up activists for a seminar that would look back at the campaign and plot a way forward.

The seminar was held in Belfast under the watchful eyes and productive supervision of Iain Reekie and Mick McGrath,

two tutors who have worked extensively throughout the Labour and trade union movement and particularly with the FBU in recent times.

Their understanding and appreciation of the pay campaign and the position the FBU finds itself in now was vital. In the event, 20 FBU representatives and

If we do nothing we will surely lose, but if we fight we just might win!

activists who had played valuable roles in the dispute attended.

As the seminar kicked off, a distinct air of scepticism was prevalent amongst those assembled. Some thought we were there to rewrite history, others thought we would re-focus blame and some just wanted to get stuff off their chests!

EDUCATION

A number of challenging views were aired, including analysis of the tactics adopted, the wisdom or otherwise of cancelling strike dates and not least, the fallout of the June Agreement which has led to the loss of Long Service Increment in its traditional form and a reinterpre-

Working groups are developing realistic strategies for dealing with the plethora of issues our Brigade has thrown at us

tation of emoluments for acting up and temporary promotion.

All present were afforded an opportunity to deconstruct our present position and suggest ways in which we could have emerged from the dispute with a better result.

However, when serious consideration was given to the political climate at the time, the forces ranged against our Union and the inevitable consequences of not ending it when we did, students stated openly that they now had a better understanding of why we as a Union are in the position we are in today, and the need for unity and a common goal for the future.

Despite many misgivings on the history and conduct of the dispute, the members attending the Working Together seminar came away with a sense of direction which had become somewhat obscured at the end of the campaign.

As one student said: "The seminar had a positive outcome as it took us from a starting point of confusion to an end point of knowing exactly where we wanted to go."

Personally, I agree with that comment. Region 2 activists set goals for the immediate future and at the time of writing I can report that working groups are actively developing realistic strategies for dealing with the plethora of issues our Brigade has thrown at us.

These include attendance management, annual leave, reduction in ridership levels, IRMPs and the ending of the Northern Ireland Allowance.

In an interesting debate on how we handle these issues with our employers, the wisdom of confrontation as a first resort was challenged.

The group proceeded to examine alternative means of winning the best deal possible for our members taking account of what is ideally achievable, what is realistically achievable and what represents a fall back position acceptable to the greatest swathe of our members.

This session provoked much thought as

The only weapon and the only chance we have is collectivism. It is time to build that again

activists gradually arrived at the realisation that we must learn and develop the other ways of "skinning the proverbial cat".

We do not know for sure how we will fare in these battles, but I can state with absolute conviction that we in Region 2 will fare much better by working together than we will if we don't work together.

It has been said for years by more experienced trade unionists than me that employers will never stop taking because that is their nature.

Time and time again trade unionists are threatened, bullied and beaten by the might of employers. The only weapon and the only chance we have is collectivism. It is time to build that again.

'The seminar had a positive outcome as it took us from a starting point of confusion to an end point of knowing exactly where we wanted to go'

If we do nothing we will surely lose, but if we fight we just might win!

The general consensus of those who attended was that it had been a very worthwhile exercise in getting the FBU in Northern Ireland into fighting shape again.

The alternative is and was to do nothing and eventually disappear, thereby handing our enemies another victory. We are steadfastly not going to let that happen!

The pay campaign and dispute has burned out a number of good people, but a positive and unexpected result of the seminar was the emergence of a number of enthusiastic, hungry and willing people to fill positions in the future.

I am confident now that the FBU in Northern Ireland has a future and the life's blood to sustain that future. We can look our employers in the face and say in the words of a local figure, well known in Northern Ireland, "We haven't gone away y'know!"

Tony Maguire is Regional Secretary, Northern Ireland (Region 2)



ON THE MOVE?

Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.



INTERNATIONAL

FORTRESS EUROPE

The UK Government was considering joining most other existing EU Member States in blocking the free movement of labour after the enlargement process takes in a string of new members – and their 74 million population – from eastern Europe on May 1.

The Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested to the House of Commons in early February that he may not stick to his promise of giving migrants from Eastern Europe the right to work in Britain.

Blair is reportedly at odds with Home Secretary David Blunkett, who is the strongest advocate within the Government of importing cheap labour from Eastern Europe to fill unskilled job vacancies in areas such as hospitality and catering.

However, they seem to both agree that the main problem is the possibility of "abuse" to the benefits system.

"Free movement of workers...was a concession we are prepared to grant but not in circumstances where it can be abused. We are therefore looking at the benefit system," Tony Blair told Parliament.

Under EU laws all EU citizens are entitled to travel throughout the union, but not necessarily as workers.

Most other EU States, also concerned about the impact of more claimants on their rather more generous welfare systems, are planning to impose limits on East European workers or require them to have work permits.

www.ft.com,
www.guardian.co.uk

STRIKES IN ITALY

Tens of thousands of Italian doctors and other public sector health workers staged a one-day strike February 9 in the latest outbreak of labour unrest to rock the Government of Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister.

It was the first occasion on which all 42 trade unions representing health workers had gone on strike simultaneously. It coincided with a pilots' stoppage that forced the cancellation of 159 flights by Alitalia, the state-run carrier.

The unrest follows a spate of official and wildcat strikes in December and January by public transport workers in Italy's biggest cities. There will be more protests next month when prosecutors and judges, angered by the Government's judicial reform plans, will stop work for a day.

The Government of media magnate Berlusconi faces great difficulties. Planned reforms of Italy's media sector were rejected last month by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, the head of state, and then provoked a revolt last week by coalition legislators who voted against the Government.

Proposed changes to the state-run pension system have provoked quarrels inside the ruling right-wing coalition and are now tied to the fate of another controversial legislative measure designed to reshape Italy's system of Government.

The pension proposals are the target of hostility from Italy's trade unions, which

helped topple Mr Berlusconi's first Government in 1994 over a similar attempted reform.

They are not, however, directly related to the labour unrest in the health service, which has been provoked by employees' frustration over delayed contract renewals and over low levels of Government expenditure.

www.ft.com,
www.guardian.co.uk

GERMANS MULL ACTION

Berthold Huber, deputy head of Germany's IG Metall trade union, is "sceptical" that an economically damaging strike in the engineering industry can be avoided, as wage talks for the sector's 3.5m workers this week enter a crucial phase.

Mr Huber said: "I'm sceptical that we can find a solution at the negotiating table." He blamed the Gesamtmetall employers' association for its "entirely unacceptable" demand to increase working hours to up to 40 a week.

A full-scale strike, possibly next month, would cause widespread industrial disruption and undermine Germany's weak economy recovery, according to economists. The union yesterday stepped up its "short warning" strikes before negotiations tomorrow in Baden-Württemberg, south-western Germany. The union's collective bargaining committee is due to meet later in the week.

Engineering negotiations are watched closely in Germany and neighbouring countries, as they often set

a pattern for other sectors. The IG Metall wants a 4 per cent wage rise this year, while Gesamtmetall has offered two increases of 1.2 per cent each, spread over 27 months, but only in combination with a new "working time corridor" of 35-40 hours a week, to be agreed on a company basis.

www.ft.com

BRUSSELS WORRIES OVER UK DEFICIT

The European Commission has sounded the alarm over the size of the UK budget deficit, warning that it was on course to breach the rules of the EU's tattered stability and growth pact this year for the first time.

Assessing Britain's readiness to join the euro between now and 2009, the commission forecast that the Government would run a deficit equivalent to 3.3% of gross domestic product, well above the ceiling stipulated in the pact. "There is a clear risk of an excessive deficit, which may have already occurred this year," it said.

www.guardian.co.uk

WTO: HANDS OFF OUR FOOD!

Public Services International, which groups public service unions the world over, is engaged in a global campaign on the US-led attempt to force Europe to accept genetically modified food and farming. People are invited to submit their individual Citizen's Objection to the WTO, demanding to dismiss the complaint. Please help the campaign by spreading this call – and sign online at www.bite-back.org.

www.world-psi.org.uk

INTERNATIONAL

A forum for the world

100,000 people from across the globe gathered in Mumbai in January to challenge a world dominated by money and military muscle, reports Jeremy Corbyn MP

THE effects of the re-structuring of manufacturing industries are not solely the preserve of Western Europe and North America.

In Mumbai there is a huge factory complex which until India's acceptance of the open market, had been the workplace of thousands of highly skilled workers, and producers of machine tools for the Indian domestic market. The gaunt buildings and trim administrative buildings have been empty for some years, used only for spectacular action scenes in Bollywood movies.

A Left activist and Mumbai architect has transformed the whole complex, with deft use of jute and cotton drapes and construction of dozens of meeting rooms from bamboo and cloth, to host a conference.

But this is no ordinary conference. The fourth World Social Forum attracted over 100,000 registered delegates, more than attended the first three in Porto Alegre, Brazil and they filled the venue with colour, passion, noise and debate.

It is hard to give a description of the World Social Forum. It is a concept that grew from the combination of political parties of the Left and social movements in Brazil; a coming together of diverse interests around a common theme.

The delegates who came to Mumbai

Members of the forest workers' union demonstrate at the WSF in Mumbai

were mainly from all parts of India, South Asia and the Far East, with smaller delegations from Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America. The themes of opposition to the war in Iraq and the continued US occupation, and opposition to the World Trade Organisation and its attempts to undermine Third World agriculture. Whilst this huge gathering was united on these issues, the Forum's remit goes much wider than this.

The Forum Programme, a formidable 116-page newspaper in Hindi, English and Spanish, painstakingly lists all the big events and the endless non-stop workshops on child labour, Australian imperialism in the Pacific, self-determination, Dalit ("untouchable") rights, legal challenges to global corporations, tourism, privatisation, peoples against Coca Cola, education and development, fundamentalism, GATS on services, human rights, mobilisation of society for peace and so on.

Intense and very well informed as these debates are, they serve as an exchange of information and ideas. The common refrain I hear from people leaving these gatherings is how friendly and un-combatative people are and how much they have learnt.

Outside in the crowded and dusty



former factory roadways, there is a permanent demonstration of different groups marching for "education not work for children", "it's non negotiable" screams their banner; the Dalit peoples who have suffered untold discrimination (despite the Indian constitutions claim to protect them) march in huge numbers and many union groups from miners to forestry workers march against re-structuring and privatisation. The surviving victims of the killings and mayhem in Gujarat tell what



Stage. There is also a film festival of radical productions of struggles from all over the world, not just economic and social causes. There is an enormous art exhibition with a cultural mix impossible to imagine in a national or commercial gallery.

For the political Left, steeped in the European tradition of self believing political parties this is sometimes hard to relate to, but they are there too. A meeting on the role of political parties and social movements attracted over 1,000 people to hear speeches from Fausto Bertinotti of Refondazione in Italy, Luis Ayala of Socialist International and the Brazilian Minister of Urban Planning who attempted to link the issues and the methods.

The world's economic structures have changed enormously, with the concentration of global power in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations, and the philosophy of the major financial institutions, including the World Trade Organisation, forcing poor countries to cut social spending, privatisate and give un-restricted power to foreign investors.

The losers in this are the laid off workers, the very poor and marginalised, and village and indigenous peoples.

The World Social Forum theme is "Another World is Possible" and thus the unity of opposition to war and for economic and social justice come together and provide a very important base for the growth of an alternative movement around the world. The Coalitions that oppose the war in Iraq have mobilised more people than anything else in history. In an era of mass communications it is possible to mobilise in a wider global sense.

The media approach to the whole event is one of bemusement. There are no decision making sessions, there are no huge disputes to report, only exuberance and for many a sense of release. I watched as hundreds of young rural workers packed into buses on Saturday night for a long and tedious ride home, happy that they had met others in similar struggles and felt the stronger for it. The normal media cannot comprehend this and the usual question is "why?"

it is like to be the victims of the hordes goaded on by right wing xenophobic politicians.

Everything is accompanied by drummers who beat ceaselessly and in great rhythm, though I have to confess that chairing a 1,500-strong discussion about Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine in six languages with the drummers outside did test everyone's powers of concentration.

Stalls and book sales abound as do plays in the Brecht Theatre or the Neruda

Two hundred and fifty MPs from all over the world came to agree on a general statement that is designed to ensure national parliaments hold global institutions to account and declaring that the accepted rubric of lifting trade barriers does not automatically help the poorest. It also declared strongly for Palestinian rights and in opposition to the military policies of the Bush administration.

There are huge signs of hope in the whole movement. In a unipolar world dominated by US military and commercial interests the other power, popular opinion, needs some focus and some outlet. Another World is, indeed, possible.

Outside the Forum arena a grim reality confronts everyone. Mumbai is a busy, polluted and crowded city. Beggars abound everywhere, children living under bridges and in the streets, all the signs of a social structure that can hardly cope. Old people, bent double in pain pick over street garbage. Yet the Indian media is full of stories of commercial success and endless business programmes extolling the virtues of the nouveau riche on the plethora of internationally owned cable channels that de-regulation has brought.

Beyond all this, a unity is needed for political change. Like many I left Mumbai with a sense of hope and exhilaration.

Jeremy Corbyn is Labour MP for Islington North and a member of the Campaign Group. Jeremy attended the World Social Forum (www.wsf.org) and was one of the speakers at the opening ceremony alongside acclaimed writer Arundhati Roy, Palestinian leader Mustafa Barghouti, Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, and 90 year old Indian Independence Campaigner Lashmi Seghal. 100,000 people attended the Forum. This article first appeared in the Morning Star. (www.poptel.org.uk/morning-star).

LETTERS

LET'S BE CONSTRUCTIVE

Dear Firefighter,

There is currently a debate among progressive people and parties about the most effective way of putting the "Labour" back into New Labour. This obviously must involve the founders of the Labour Party – the trade unions.

This is a necessary debate. However, there are no easy answers. It is important that, as a progressive trade union, the FBU is fully involved in the politics of the wider movement and does not condemn itself to destructive infighting.

It has been a testing two years in which the FBU has fought a correct and brave campaign and won a pay rise in the most difficult of circumstances. The Government was so fearful of our Union that it brought the full weight of the State to bear in its efforts to defeat us.

The last time this happened was 1984 when the National Union of Mineworkers was deliberately crushed by Thatcher's Government who had long hatched a plan to break one of the most powerful unions in Britain.

It is to the credit and yes, the bravery of everybody involved, that the Government failed to break the FBU.

Of course there is disappointment that the percentage won was not higher – though it is the highest in any sector that I have heard about. Also, the improvement in the pay formula will produce proper wage increases in the future years. Let us not snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

It is right and proper that there is debate and analysis throughout the FBU about the pay campaign. Our democratic structure is central to our politics. However, I am aware that there has been a great deal of personal abuse directed at Officials of the Union. This is extremely disappointing. It is a very poor substitute for genuine political discussions.

We should be discussing policies, strategies and tactics, not descending to the petty, the offensive and the

bullying tactics which only demean our movement. We should, together with other progressive trade unions, be involved in thinking about the most effective way of advancing the causes of working people.

The trade union movement is now more progressive in its politics than it has been for 20 years. This is extremely significant for all working men and women in all trade unions.

It is well documented that in the 1950s senior political and trade union figures worked both overtly and covertly with clandestine organisations, including the security services, to discredit, damage and ultimately destroy progressive politics and individuals in the Electrician's and Engineering unions, which were considered key areas of the economy.

The Left was demonised. It has taken decades to begin to prise the iron heel of reactionary policies off our trade union movement.

If the FBU is seen to be riven with internal conflict based on personal attack, which is wholly negative in outlook, which destabilises progressive leadership at every level and which fails to engage with political debate in the wider movement then the Government will indeed have succeeded in neutering our Union and also rendering the whole trade union movement less effective.

**Ken Cameron
FBU General Secretary 1980-2000
Glasgow**

TIME TO START AGAIN

Dear Firefighter

Whilst I have the utmost respect and admiration for Tony Benn, I would wish to challenge his analysis in respect of trade unions retaining their affiliation to the "New" Labour Party (Firefighter Jan/Feb 2003, Page 9).

Tony's own experience – as a profound thinker and in my opinion, the greatest politician of his generation – of

being marginalised within the Labour Party by a succession of self-serving, politically myopic lightweights, should tell us all we need to know about the nature of politics and especially "New" Labour.

I would add my own, recent experience. I joined the Labour Party 25 years ago and was drawn into the local political process. I wanted develop local governance based on an inclusive community.

Having become leader of my local council, my opponents, aided by a destabilisation campaign in the local press and the involvement of a local MP, engineered my de-selection from the panel of candidates.

The selection process adopted, excluded involvement by grass roots party members and was in my opinion, a disciplinary process in all but name. However, no charges were made, no due process allowed, no rules of evidence included. It was simply a cull, exercised from the top down.

Like Tony Benn, I believed the pendulum would eventually swing back to the left and democracy would prevail. However, my recent experience tells me that democracy has also gone and we are left with an institution dedicated to short-term electoral expediency.

The trade union movement gave birth to the Labour Party, so there is no reason why it can't give birth to another "Labour" Party that retains democratic socialist values. However, the historical problem with the Left has always been an inability to unite as a single cohesive force. This would be the main challenge.

Mike Hughes (Out of Trade Member)

PALESTINE CONFLICT

Dear Firefighter

I fear Sidney Hart has forgotten the reason for the beginnings of the present Intifada in Israel. On 18 September 2000 Ariel Sharon and his bodyguards, accompanied by 1,500 Israeli police,

entered the Haram al-Shariff (Temple Mount) the location of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Sharon knew that this would instigate a reaction from the Moslem community and, therefore, enable Sharon to claim that they were incapable of participating in peace negotiations. He was successful in initiating a violent response and has used this ploy several times since.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine goes back to Zionism, which was founded in 1897 by a man called Theodore Herzl. His aim was the settlement in Palestine of an autonomous Jewish state by whatever means necessary.

In 1905, British Prime Minister and anti-semite, Arthur Balfour introduced an Aliens Bill to "Curb the influx of immigrants, mainly from eastern Europe, of the undoubted evils that had fallen upon the country from an immigration that was largely Jewish".

Balfour became a pro-Zionist and issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

Two years later, Balfour stated: "In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants (Palestinians). Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."

During the first world war, Lawrence of Arabia had convinced Arab tribes to assist in pushing the Ottoman Army back to Turkey with a promise of self-determination in their own territory. However, the British and French, drew up boundaries of the new states which were to be a partial cause of the problems in the Middle East today.

When Lawrence returned to the UK as a Colonel, he gave up his pension, as a protest, because he had been used to betray the Arabs.

Palestine became a British mandate and between 1940 and 1948 there was armed conflict between militant Zionist terrorists and the British. Amongst those

terrorists were Menachem Begin, David Ben Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan and Yitzhak Shamir. In July 1946, the bombing of the British officers' quarters at The King David Hotel, Jerusalem, which resulted in 91 deaths, was carried out by Menachem Begin under direct orders from Ben Gurion.

In 1948, Ben Gurion stated his war aims: "A Christian state should be established in Lebanon, with its southern border on the Litani river. We will make an alliance with it. When we smash the Arab legion's strength and bomb Amman, we will eliminate Trans-Jordan too, then Syria will fall. If Egypt still dares to fight on, we shall bomb Port Said, Alexandria and Cairo...and in this fashion we will end the war and settle our forefathers' account with Egypt, Assyria and Aram."

In 1948, Menachem Begin led the attack and massacre of Arab women and children in Deir Yassin. In 1982, Sharon was linked to the ethnic cleansing of 1,700 Palestinian women and children from the Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps in Beirut. More recently, Israel's attacks on Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus, Hebron and Bethlehem were carried out with no regard for the death or suffering of innocent Palestinians.

Israeli terrorism has driven the Palestinians into a rash of isolated Bantustans with no freedom of movement in their own country while Israeli settlements continue to expand.

Palestinians are routinely terrorised by Israel, the world's fourth largest military power.

Joe Kelsell
Out of Trade Member,
Liverpool



Thanks ...

Dear Firefighter

Following my recent successful appeal against the London Fire Brigade for loss of hearing and tinnitus, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the FBU for their help. Special thanks to Joe McVeigh and Dick Blackler whose help proved invaluable.

It is nice to know that as a retired member I could still depend on the full support of the Union.

Les Barnes,
Ex Tottenham Red Watch Branch
Cheshunt (Herts)

Dear Firefighter

This is the letter I have wanted to write for three long years: a thank you letter for your assistance and backing of my fight for compensation against Cleveland Fire Brigade.

Mr Andrew McDonald of Thompsons Solicitors obtained an out of court settlement and I cannot praise him highly enough for all his work, effort and commitment to my case.

I would also like to thank Kev Gelders, my Union Rep who did everything and more to help me through troubled times.

Without the FBU I would have been brushed aside but with the FBU's complete backing we were able to access legal representation to pursue our case.

Anyone who questions the necessity of a Union just point them in my direction.

Name and address supplied

The Firefighter welcomes letters from readers.

Please send them to

FBU Head Office

Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road

Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE

and include your name, address and branch/region

25 YEAR BADGES



Station officer Ade Hurren receives his 25 year badge from Mark Miller



Alan Irlam, Berkshire Brigade Chair receiving his 25 year badge from Eddie Cardoso, Berkshire Brigade Secretary



Station officer Julian Hancock receives his 25 year badge from Mark Miller



Kevin Butcher receiving his 25 year badge from Steve Collins



Peter Barker of Pembroke Dock Fire Station, Mid & West Wales, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Peter Jennings



Phil Bowen of Pembroke Dock Fire Station, Mid & West Wales, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Peter Jennings



Andy Giles, Bracknell Branch Chair receiving his 25 year badge from Alan Irlam, Berkshire Brigade Chair



Kevin Gibson, (Lancashire) receives his 25yr badge from station rep Pete Turner



Station Officers Hugh McLeod and Ken Pringle receiving their 25 year badges from Branch Chair Mark Gerrard at Tynemouth Branch, Tyne and Wear



Ray Ahmun of South Wales Fire Service receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Dave Shepard



Raymond Martin receives his 25 year badge from Damien Traynor and Peter O'Hare



Simon (Wally) Wakefield receives his 25 year badge from Linda Smith